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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000447

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DEPT FOR EUR/WE LEVIN; AF: SNYDER; AF/SPG SMALL; AF/E;  
AF/RSA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: DARFUR: SANT EGIDIO READY TO ENGAGE

REF: A) 04 VATICAN 2892; B) FEB 18 SMALL- MARTIN EMAIL

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, POL, Vatican, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary and Action Request  
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1. (C) Community of Sant'Egidio representatives told the Charge February 24 that they were willing to work with the Darfur rebels to help them become better prepared for the Abuja negotiations. In confidential talks that could be held at its Rome headquarters, Sant'Egidio proposed a preparatory "training program" to help rebels prepare for more serious political engagement. They believe that such a session could help the rebel groups develop a greater clarity of purpose, better organization, and more realistic expectations that could make the next round of talks in Abuja more productive. Sant'Egidio made clear that this training initiative would require close coordination with the Department both to identify participants, and to guide the discussions. They also envision eventual African Union (AU) participation. Sant'Egidio's representatives said they were ready to begin planning right away and agreed that an early March timetable would allow time to prepare the rebels for the next round of talks. Please advise post of Department interest in pursuing this proposal (please see paragraph seven). End Summary.

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Sant'Egidio Ready to Move Forward  
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2. (C) Community of Sant'Egidio representatives told the Charge February 24 that they were willing and eager to pursue a plan proposed informally by the AF bureau (ref a) to intensify engagement with the Darfur rebels by hosting a series of confidential talks at their Rome headquarters. Representatives

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Claudio Betti, Mario Giro, and Vittorio Scelzi said Sant'Egidio has kept up its contact with both Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leaders since making an offer last summer to facilitate negotiations (ref b). Various rebel leaders have since visited Sant'Egidio's headquarters.

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Rebels Must Learn to Negotiate  
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3. (C) Betti and Giro were on the same page with AF on the bureau's informal proposal. They said it was clear that the Darfur rebels did not know how to negotiate, and could not engage productively in current talks because of a lack of organization and the fact that, as Betti put it, "they don't even know what they want." The key, Sant'Egidio officials said, would be to work with the rebels to help them identify and prioritize their goals, and bring them to understand that negotiating also meant more than "just saying 'no' again and again." Betti said the rebels needed a dose of reality, comparing the situation to the Community's work in the Liberian conflict. "When the Liberian rebels came here, they all thought they would be vice-president; but when they left they all knew that was impossible," Betti recalled. Sant'Egidio plans to help rebels gain the greater clarity of purpose, better organization, and more realistic expectations that could help make the next round of talks in Abuja more productive.

4. (C) Sant Egidio would prefer to gather all the rebel groups together rather than deal with them sequentially, so that they can develop a common approach. They also stressed the importance of uprooting the rebels from Asmara, where they come under the meddling influence of the authorities. Sant'Egidio believes the credibility of the AU talks is at stake, and that some sign of progress in the next round will be essential. At present, the rebels lack both an understanding of how to engage in a political process and a grasp of the international context of the conflict. Up to now, they have been courted by the international media, and have come to believe that they can simply restate their positions endlessly without truly engaging with their interlocutors.

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Whom to Invite  
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15. (C) Sant'Egidio envisions several days of talks with SLA and JEM leaders. They mentioned the names of several SLA leaders as likely participants but said that they would want to consult closely with the Department when drawing up a list of invitees.

Giro cautioned that it would be important to keep the number of principals down, as he imagined that each principal would come with a small entourage, including some with wives. A group of four leaders would quickly become a party of fifteen.

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U.S., AU Participation  
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16. (C) Sant'Egidio believes U.S. participation and international pressure would be necessary to entice some leaders to participate. Betti said that U.S. participation for the duration of the discussions would be essential, though he noted it would not have to be at senior levels -- at least at the start of the talks. Giro also anticipated inviting the chief African Union (AU) negotiator to come to Rome to meet the group after the first week of what he imagined would be two weeks of discussions. Although the Community has had little contact with him, Betti and Giro stressed their good relations with previous negotiator Sam Ibok and the AU in general. "They know us well," Betti said, and noted that the AU had come to Sant'Egidio with a similar proposal to aid in negotiations some time ago. He emphasized that they were not looking to sideline the AU, but only to prepare the groundwork for more productive AU efforts. Their goal was to aid, not undermine the AU's efforts, Betti stressed.

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Action Request: Next Steps  
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17. (C) Sant'Egidio representatives said they were ready to begin Qeir "training" initiative as soon as possible, and agrQ that an early March timetable would allow time to prepare the rebels for the next round of talks in Abuja. Post requests Department advise of its interest in pursuing the AF informal proposal with Sant'Egidio and next steps. Sant'Egidio understands that considerable coordination will be needed to identify participants and arrange for their travel to Rome. Sant'Egidio would be amenable to direct contact from AF, though Post requests that Department keep us closely advised of contacts and discussions with the Community.

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